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Top Reagan aide warns Soviets

Meese says transition does not affect ability to meet crisis

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WASHINGTON — President-elect Ronald Reagan's chief aide yesterday said it would be a "grave miscalculation" for the Soviet Union to think that the United States was less capable of responding to the Polish crisis during the change in administrations.

Edwin Meese 3d, Reagan's transition director, said President Jimmy Carter was "totally in control of foreign policy and all the apparatus of government during that period of time, and we are very supportive of him in maintaining that control."

Meese said Carter and Reagan got the benefit of the same briefings and "both men are equally knowledgeable." He said: "I think the Soviets would make a grave miscalculation if they perceive any weakness in the structure in this kind of interregnum."

At a press briefing yesterday, Meese also cautioned against speculation on the makeup of the 13-member Cabinet, and said Reagan would begin announcing his choices within a few days. The President-elect plans to spend the first part of next week in New York City and come to Washington on Wednesday for private meetings, social events and national security briefings.

"Whoever is talking to you and saying they know what's happening is not telling the truth and doesn't know," Meese said. "The people who do know aren't talking. So don't be misled by all the rumors that are going around."

Meese, an unruffled and usually candid man, may have been suggesting that last-minute problems had developed with some of the choices. Most reports have said Reagan had settled on Alexander Haig as Secretary of State, Caspar Weinberger for Defense, Citicorp chairman Walter Wriston for Treasury, William French Smith for Attorney General and Sen. Richard Schweiker for Health and Human Ser-

Meese said that the selection process was on schedule but was "complex" because of the conflict of interest laws that prospective Cabinet secretaries must comply with. Candidates for the top posts, he said, have to sit down with their lawyers and discuss all the implications. "It takes a week before the candidate can make a reply to the President-elect," he said.

Under the ethics in government laws signed two years ago, senior officials in all three branches of government are required to make their financial status public. Another provision strengthens prohibitions against the "revolving door" practice of people shifting between government and private life and to reduce opportunities for special interests to gain easy access to government officials. Reagan has said he wants people in his administration who have already been successful in their fields and are not "empire builders."

Meanwhile, United Press International reported yesterday from Los Angeles that Reagan's top advisers had decided against appointing transition press secretary James Brady to the job of White House press secretary. A decision has been made to downgrade the position from the high-profile post now held by Jody Powell. James A. Baker 3d, who will be the White House chief of staff, will also be in charge of press operations. The wire service reported that Reagan's talent scouts were looking for a woman for the job.

During yesterday's session with reporters, Meese seemed unconcerned about a report that two members of the transition staff had been contacted by Soviet embassy officers. Earlier in the week, CIA officials revealed a contact had been made during a briefing held for transition officials on foreign surveillance and intelligence work.

Meese acknowledged that some of the Reagan transition officials have had social contacts with the Soviets at the embassy, which is located close to the Reagan transition headquarters. But Meese said the warning by the CIA agents was routine and intended to inform newcomers to Washington about the realities of Soviet intelligence activity, and was not in response to any attempts at infiltration. "It was a preventive type" of session, he said.

Meese went out of his way to stress Reagan's preparedness to take over the reins of government Jan. 20 and to deal with many of the problems that beset Carter. He said he will have options ready to deal with the hostage situation in Iran and will be in full control of other international crises, such as the prospect of a Soviet invasion of Poland. At the same time, Meese said, Reagan is holding off advising the Carter Administration on what it ought to do. "It is not our place to tell them what to do. But we will be fully informed," said Meese.

An Interim Foreign Policy Board set up to make recommendations to Reagan on matters such as Iran and Poland, meanwhile, will meet with Reagan in Washington on Dec. 13. The board, headed by William Casey, Reagan's former campaign manager, consists of leading Republicans, including former President Gerald Ford and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and Democrats such as Sen. Henry Jackson. Their efforts are being coordinated by Richard V. Allen, Reagan's chief foreign policy adviser.

A second advisory group of 120 members has been submitting long-

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